

AN
ADDRESS
FROM
THE LIVERPOOL SOCIETY
FOR THE
Abolition of Slavery,
ON
THE SAFEST AND MOST EFFICACIOUS MEANS
OF PROMOTING THE
GRADUAL IMPROVEMENT OF THE NEGRO SLAVES
IN THE
British West India Islands,
PREPARATORY TO THEIR BECOMING FREE LABOURERS,
AND ON THE EXPECTED
CONSEQUENCES OF SUCH CHANGE.

LIVERPOOL,
Printed by Jonathan & George Smith.

1824.

AN ADDRESS, &c.

THE LIVERPOOL SOCIETY FOR PROMOTING THE ABOLITION OF SLAVERY, adhering to the primary object of its institution, that of obtaining authentic information respecting the nature and effects of Negro Slavery, and communicating the same to the public, in order that correct ideas may be entertained on the subject, as well by those who conceive themselves to be interested in its support, as by those who contend for its abolition, have not thought it incumbent on them, as a body, to enter into the discussions which have lately taken place respecting the impolicy of Negro Slavery in a commercial point of view. Not that they conceive such question is not a proper and important subject of discussion, or because they entertain any doubt that from the investigations that have already taken place, it will be found to be impolitic as well as unjust; but because the objections of this Society to the continuance of Negro Slavery, are founded on its inherent injustice and inhumanity, and cannot be modified, or relinquished, by any decision that may relate to subjects of expediency only.

For the same reason, the Society does not conceive it necessary to take a prominent part in the questions now agitated, respecting the conduct of the master towards the slave—

whether the authority of the one over the other be exercised with mildness or severity. That in many instances the slaves are treated with as much humanity as the nature of laborious slavery will admit, the Society has not the smallest doubt ; but the Society has before stated that its objection is to slavery itself, under whatever form it appears, or however it may be carried on. It is the relation of master and slave, injurious alike to the moral disposition, principles, and character of both ; it is the degradation of a human being to a condition on a level with that of a brute ; it is the spectacle of a great and powerful nation priding itself on its liberty, its generosity, and its prosperity, yet committing a crime of the deepest dye against a defenceless and unoffending people,—that concentrates the attention, and calls for the efforts of the Society, to place this subject in its true light, and to endeavour, to the best of its power, to suggest the most safe, speedy, and effectual means that may lead to the termination of such an acknowledged evil.

In thus stating the grounds of its own proceedings, the Society is convinced it is joined by the voice of the nation at large, which, at length awakened to a just sense of the enormity of its offence, has avowed an almost unanimous determination to free itself from the guilt of its further continuance. This sentiment has been expressed from one extremity of the kingdom to the other, in a manner which has already produced the most important results. Nor, whilst the nation thus acknowledges its guilt, and calls upon the legislature to remove it, does it judge itself with undue severity or injustice. The nation is, in fact, the offender ; and it is incumbent on the nation to see that the offence is removed. Nor are we to suppose that the present holders of Colonial possessions, as such, are necessarily culpable in a more peculiar manner than the rest of their fellow-subjects, it being well known that Colonial, like any other kind of

property, has in part devolved upon its present possessors by acts not their own, and under institutions which had been established long before they came into existence. We therefore by no means consider ourselves as acting in a spirit of hostility, or opposition to the Colonial proprietors, or as promoting measures injurious to their best and most permanent interests. If indeed we could combine the views and efforts of the mother country and the Colonial proprietors in one common cause, there is reason to presume that means might be adopted, which, without compromising the safety, injuring the property, or infringing on the claims of the proprietors, would advance the slaves in the scale of civilization, by the regular communication of moral and religious instruction, and the concession of domestic and personal rights; till they partake of the character of a well regulated peasantry. That such a state might be established, by kind and judicious means, not only without loss or danger, but with great advantage to the master, there is strong reason to believe; as every approximation to the cultivation of the land by free labour, will be found, not only to be a diminution of expense, but in due time to improve the quality, and increase the value of the soil. It is by this union of exertion, information, ability, and object, that the difficulties which present themselves can be best surmounted, the apprehended evils avoided, and a state of society gradually introduced, which there is every reason to believe will hereafter be considered as the true foundation of the prosperity of our West Indian possessions.

So far, indeed, is this Society from entertaining an opinion, that a just and reasonable improvement in the character and condition of the slave population will be attended with danger to the proprietors, that they conceive such danger rests in a contrary course; and that an

avowed opposition in the Colonies to the earnest wishes of the British nation, cannot fail to give rise to consequences deeply to be lamented in every point of view ; but which are chargeable only on those who are the wilful and voluntary cause of them, and not upon the friends and promoters of Negro emancipation, whose views are wholly concentrated in the well-being, improvement, and happiness of this integral portion of the British dominions. The Society cannot, therefore, but perceive, with the greatest anxiety, the measures of resistance resorted to in some of the islands, and the examples of riot and violence which have in some few instances unhappily occurred. Nor can they forbear to express their indignation and surprise, at the attempts that have been made to charge the promoters of Negro emancipation with being the cause of disorders and calamities that could only have arisen from an adherence to that system of oppression, which it is their most earnest desire gradually to mitigate, and finally to remove. From the responsibility involved in any consequences which can be fairly imputed to its measures, the Society is in no degree inclined to shrink ; but they protest against the disposition which has been manifested to charge them with every disaster of whatever kind which may occur in the Colonies, whether arising from those elements of danger and discord which are inherent in the very system, or from the violence and indiscretion of the Colonists themselves. The Society, therefore, avail themselves of this opportunity to repeat their decided resolution to persevere by all lawful, just, and peaceable measures, in carrying forwards the great work in which they have engaged ; without being deterred by unfounded aspersions, either of those who misunderstand their object, or of those who, having abandoned the cause in which they had engaged, have inconsiderately and injuriously imputed to them measures which

they never contemplated, and sentiments which they have expressly disavowed.

The present is to the Colonial proprietors an important crisis. Whether it will prove advantageous or injurious must depend upon themselves. Already they feel the consequences of the present system, and are undersold by the produce of other parts of the world. Under these circumstances, protecting duties and bounties have been extended to them by the parent country, and they still solicit further assistance. Let them ask themselves, whether the British people, now aware of the nature of the support they thus afford, and finding that they tax themselves for no other purpose than to perpetuate a practice at which their feelings revolt, will be likely long to continue a support which renders them participators of the guilt? and whether the avowal of a determination in the Colonists to persevere in an opposition to the mother country, must not defeat every reasonable expectation of continued aid?

In thus expressing its desire for the favourable disposition and co-operation of the Colonial proprietors, this Society has not deviated from the principles upon which it is founded, or the language which it originally employed; having in its former Declaration expressly admitted that, "with every disposition on the part of the Colonial proprietors to adopt a different system, there must be some necessary precautions, some deliberate and gradual process, which should progressively give to the slave the feelings of independence, without the danger of licentiousness; and enable him to perceive that the necessity of providing for his own subsistence, though less degrading, is not less imperative, than that under which he had before been compelled to return to his daily task."

We trust, then, it will not be objected to us, that in thus endeavouring to engage all those who are most nearly interested in the welfare of our West India population, in united efforts for its promotion, we are advocating a forlorn or a hopeless cause. If, however, there be some persons on whom the striking change of public opinion, with respect to the continuance of slavery, has not yet produced sufficient conviction, the Society hope to be permitted, in a few words, to inquire into the reasons of this adherence to a system denounced through civilized and enlightened society, and into the results which can alone be expected to arise from it. Will it be said by the defenders of compulsory labour, that the present condition of our West India Colonies is such as to display a manifest superiority over that, by which the same articles are produced by free labour in other parts of the world? Or is it not, on the contrary, admitted in the most explicit terms, that such articles may be, and are produced by voluntary labourers, at a much lower price than they can be afforded from our own Colonies? and that protecting duties are necessary to enable the British planter to contend with those of other states? May we further be permitted to ask, what is the nature of a protecting duty or bounty? Or why a country should tax itself, in order to support a portion of its subjects in a trade or pursuit, which they cannot continue without it? Undoubtedly, because there is reason to believe, that by a temporary assistance, such trade or employment will be enabled to recover itself, and remunerate the country for its support. But will any one be now found to assert that the continued and invariable cultivation of our Colonial possessions, by slave-labour, will be likely to produce such a result? Or would its most strenuous advocates choose to fix a period when the bounties now granted

might safely terminate, and the protecting duties be withdrawn? Or is there not, on the contrary, every reason to conclude, that in many of our Islands, a considerable deterioration of the soil has taken place, in consequence of the long and uniform continuance of slave-cultivation, and that a further perseverance in the same system, will produce still more injurious effects? When we look at the recent improvements in agriculture, and the increase of produce in the parent country, and consider the stationary or diminished crops of our Colonial possessions, and the difficulty with which they contend with their rivals for a market, we naturally seek for the cause in the expense of labour, the want of manures, and the consequent exhaustion of the soil, or in other words, in *causes inseparable from the continuance of Slavery*; which, from all the information we have been enabled to obtain on the subject, as well from the United States of America, as the West Indies, appears to be more expensive than free labour, wherever they have been brought into competition.

Having thus briefly endeavoured to state the *expediency* of the plan we have ventured to recommend, we hope we may now be allowed to add a few words as to its *practicability*.

If by the term *practicability* be understood the mere power of setting the slaves at liberty, certain it is, that they who claim an absolute right of property, can relinquish it whenever they think fit; but this is not the practicability to which we allude. Such a separation, inconsiderately and suddenly accomplished, and particularly if effected by great numbers at once, could scarcely fail to be productive of consequences highly injurious to all the parties. The habits and dispositions induced by the long continuance of personal slavery, cannot be instantaneously corrected or removed; nor can we expect that the slave

can at once rise to the character of the free man, and act under the influence of feelings to which he is yet a stranger. It is only by a gradual, humane, and steady process, or rather by a combination of suitable means, that we can expect to attain this object; and towards this more just and desirable state of things some progress has already been made; but the steps already taken, render the timely and cautious adoption of further measures indispensably necessary. The dismissal of the whip as the stimulant of labour, has already been directed by his Majesty's Government, and implicitly assented to in some of the Colonies. It must however, be observed, that even this first step in the course of improvement, cannot be accomplished without combining with it others, to be simultaneously adopted. No person, slave or free, will labour without a motive. The motive of the slave is, at present, the fear of punishment. Withdraw this, and he will work no more than a brute animal. Accordingly, it has been said, with the strictest truth, that through all our plantations, the produce is obtained by the immediate discipline of the lash. It is evident, therefore, that in removing this, we must substitute another motive to supply its place; and this motive can only be one that shall apply to the mind, or reason, of the being to be influenced. Here then we see, intelligibly marked, the eternal distinction which nature and justice have placed, between the treatment of human beings and brutes; and that to apply to the former the discipline of the latter, is to degrade the image of God, and to trample his best gift under foot—a crime the more odious, as it appears from the example of almost all the rest of the world, in every variety of soil and climate, that such a system of compulsive labour is by no means requisite to the abundant production of all the necessaries of life; and that the ground is not more

willing to bring forth its fruits, than man is willing, under the influence of moral motives, and without compulsion, to cultivate it. What then is the motive, that in withdrawing the whip, we must immediately substitute in its place? Undoubtedly one that shall act upon the *mind* of the slave, as a perpetual stimulus to compel him to labour; and this can be no other than the hope of being able, by his exertions, to attain to a situation where he may, eventually, rest from his fatigues, and dispose of his time by his own will, or, in other words, may become free. Give him, then, the power of purchasing his own freedom, and the opportunity of employment to obtain the means of effecting it. Short of this, all that can be offered to him is of no avail; but this includes in itself every thing desirable in human life—peace, health, domestic happiness, education, religion, respectability, and repose; and however distant in the view, yet grant but the possibility of attainment, and not a moment of all the long interval will be lost. Every morning's sun will rise brighter than the former—and if the eagerness of the effort do not counteract the practicability of attainment, it is impossible that it should not be crowned with success.

For this purpose it will, however, be necessary that a *progressive* system should be established, by which the *habits of industry* and the *relaxation of slavery* should keep equal pace with each other: and it should be placed in the power of the slave, by his own efforts, gradually to purchase his emancipation. This might be done, by fixing a reasonable value, and allowing him to pay it at the rate of a day, or half a day, in the week, as already practised in the Spanish and Portuguese colonies. Thus, if we were to adopt the idea of Mr. Barham, who estimates the slave at £80, and if we were to allow him to purchase his own freedom by half a day at a time, or a twelfth part of his

value, it is evident that for the sum of £6, 13s. 4d, he would obtain half a day at his own disposal, at which time he might either labour for himself, in obtaining produce for the market, or engage himself by task-work to those who might have occasion for his services. This plan once begun would proceed in an increased ratio, and in a course of time proportioned to his exertions, he would become his own master. If we suppose that by this process he should be enabled, in each year, to purchase half a day in each week, it would require twelve years to purchase his freedom, at the end of which time, it may reasonably be presumed he would have acquired such habits of industry, as would induce him to continue his labours, and after having obtained his freedom, to secure for himself the necessaries, and even the conveniences of life.

Here a new scene of things would gradually open; and as the Negro began to feel the desire of enjoyment common to all human beings, he would provide himself with the articles that offered themselves to his notice, and from being a mere tiller of the soil, would himself become a *consumer*; so that in due time the great population of the islands would constitute an industrious body of people, adding to the numbers of the Colony, and purchasing the manufactures of the mother country. Nor would the advantages to the master, considered merely with reference to his pecuniary interests, be of less importance. The amount annually derived from the purchase of their freedom, would form a considerable addition to the income of his property. The cultivation by task-work would keep pace with the abolition of slavery; and when the whole of the slaves were liberated, it is not difficult to foresee that the value of the land *alone*, from the improved modes of cultivation, and the increased demand for the necessa-

ries of life, would not be less than that of both the land and slaves upon the present system; whilst, by the amount paid for their purchase by the slaves, the Colonial proprietors would have been, for many years, in the receipt of an ample income, and would, without any real loss to themselves, have received one portion, at least, of the immense sum which Mr. Barham claims from the country*—having obtained the purchase of the slaves from the slaves themselves, who, having thus risen to a higher rank in society, would become, in many instances, not merely the labourers, but the farmers and occupants of land: thus giving to it an additional value, of which, although the precise extent is not easy to calculate, the certainty is not difficult to foresee.

To this primary and most desirable mode of emancipation, others should be united, of which the following are the most important.—1. The entire abolition of that remnant of the Slave-trade, which consists in the sale and transportation of slaves from one British colony to another; a practice which, by keeping up a continual change, operates in a manner nearly as unfavourable to all progressive improvement, as the Slave-trade itself.—2. The attachment of the slaves more peculiarly to the soil, in the nature of *adscripti glebæ*, not to be sold or punished, except for offences proved before a competent authority.—3. The regular solemnization of marriage amongst the slaves, and the correction of licentious intercourse by established laws.—4. The right of acquiring and retaining property, and disposing of the same by deed or will.—5. The power, after certain preliminary qualifications, of giving testimony in courts of law.—6. The freedom of all children

* Mr. Barham calculates the value of our Colonial possessions at 128 millions, of which that of the slaves alone amounts to 64 millions.

born in marriage after the father has begun to purchase his freedom, and whom he supports at his own expense. When by these, and similar regulations, the condition of the slave is gradually improved, and he has imbibed the feelings of a husband and a parent, the idea of property, and the consciousness that reliance is placed on his asseverations, the barrier between slavery and freedom is nearly withdrawn. That voluntary labour would be attended with greater certainty and less expense to the employer, there can be no doubt. The rate of wages would, as in all countries, have reference to the price of provisions; the exorbitant demands of some, would be met by the willingness of others to labour for a more reasonable support. The same circumstances would take place as occur in other countries, under the adoption of free labour—a new soul would be given to the population, a greater activity would prevail through all ranks, and better modes of cultivation be introduced. The Negro population would no longer appear as a distinct mass, separated and numbered out in opposition to the White; but like the laborious part of the population in other countries, would form the great body of the people—a faithful and a hardy race, attached to their native spot by the strongest feelings of the human mind—no longer a cause of disgrace, anxiety, terror, and distrust, but a support, an honour, and a defence.

In assenting to these statements, and in the adoption of measures for carrying them into effect, the Society trust that no friend to the claims of human nature, the character of his country, or his own true interests, can be found indifferent; but if objections should still arise, let us, in a few words, consider upon what they are founded.—The claim brought forward by an able advocate of the British Colonists is, that as the mother country has sanctioned

and encouraged the cultivation of the West India Islands, by the labour of slaves, and now means to abrogate that practice, it is incumbent on her to purchase the whole of the Colonies, at the expense of nearly 130 millions.† The answer is, that the country does not intend, and has never proposed to abolish the cultivation of the soil in its present form; until measures are adopted not only for continuing it by safer, better, and more effectual means, but for improving and extending the cultivation, preventing those disasters that might otherwise be apprehended, establishing their internal governments upon the principles of British law, and rendering them an advantage to the parent state; instead of what there is at present too much reason to apprehend, an incumbrance and an expense. If, in the prosecution of this object, inconveniences should arise, and unavoidable losses be incurred, either by states or individuals, it will then be proper for the Colonists to apply to Parliament for that relief, which, under such circumstances, the nation could not refuse to give; but to suppose that the nation would, in the first instance, charge itself with the enormous responsibility that must attach to an undertaking, which can only be conducted under the immediate direction of prudent, skilful, and deeply interested individuals, is a proposition to which even the eccentricities of the celebrated South Sea scheme afford no parallel.

As it is by the frequent sale and transfer of slaves from Island to Island, that the evils of the system of slavery are greatly supported, and all attempts at improvement impeded; and as the termination of this traffic is subject to the decision of the British Legislature, in the

† See Considerations on the Abolition of Negro Slavery, and the means of practically effecting it. By J. Barham, Esq.

same manner as its parent stock, the African Slave Trade, the Liverpool Society wishes to point out the advantages which, in its judgment, would either immediately or remotely be derived from the adoption of such measure.

It is only on the ground of humanity that this country can interfere with France, Spain, and Portugal, for the abolition of their Slave-trade; but surely we ought first to extinguish what exists of our own between Island and Island. Then, and not till then, we may go with clean hands before the other maritime powers, and expect a favourable answer to our representations.

By the termination of the Slave-trade in our own Colonies, the Slaves themselves would advance in the scale of improvement. Under the mode of treatment we have contemplated, Slaves would multiply fully as fast as free men; and from various examples in the West Indies and America, we might reasonably expect an increase of at least 25 per cent. every ten years. What, may we ask, would be the consequence of this increase, even without any positive exertions of benevolence for the emancipation of the slaves? We find that, in the oldest British Colonies, with the exception only of Jamaica, that the population thirty years ago, or more, was greater than it now is; and we may therefore presume that it is now as numerous as, under present circumstances, there is occasion for. If, then, 25 per cent. were added to the population in ten years, additional employment must either be found, or the slaves must be at liberty to seek it for themselves, or, in other words, would become free.

Under such circumstances, the British Colonists would probably follow the example of the Spaniards and Portuguese—they would make their own bricks and the packages of their cotton and sugars; they would also refine or clay their sugars, and make every thing for themselves

which they could so obtain with more advantage and less expense than by importing; and in the present state of commercial knowledge, no objection would be raised in the mother country in the way of their doing any thing which would be to their own advantage; it being immaterial to this country in what manner the Colonists take payment for their produce.

During this state of things, the industry, the knowledge, the habits, and the comforts of the slaves, would be gradually improving. Necessity, and a desire to enjoy the fruits of labour, would be found to operate—equally in warm as in cold countries.—The proprietors would at every step find their property increased, by a gradual transfer of value from the slaves to the land; and from the adoption of the measures before suggested, circumstances would concur to fit them for freedom, just at the time when, from their increased population, and other favourable circumstances, their masters would be prepared, and would find it for their interest, to set them free. Nor is it to be considered as a slight advantage, that the West India Colonies would then become a suitable place of residence for young men of talent and exertion, from the mother country, who might there prosecute their respective employments, without those deplorably injurious effects upon the principles, character, and morals, which must unavoidably ensue, as long as they are conducted under a system of slavery.

Suggestions have been thrown out by the advocates for Slavery, that if the Slaves in the British Colonies were liberated, they would be too indolent to labour; the consequence of which, it is said, would be a great increase of the Slave-trade of other nations, and of Slave cultivation in their Colonies;—whence it is inferred, that we might chance to increase, rather than diminish, the evils of

humanity. From all that the Society can collect, by the information obtained on this subject, the precise reverse of this would be the fact. If, in the course of time, we could have a large population of free labourers on the fertile soils of Demerara, how could the planters of the Brazils and Cuba stand the competition? They would be compelled to relinquish both Slavery and the Slave-trade. But at all events, the mode here pointed out, of a gradual improvement, and consequent increase of population, could have no such pernicious tendency; as the labourer would, in such cases, seek the employer, and not the employer the labourer; nor would the slaves be liberated until they had acquired industrious habits; and when so liberated, they would soon destroy all motive for foreign Slave-trade, by the competition of the cheaper productions of free labour; whilst, at the same time, they would prevent the possibility of a recurrence to the cultivation of the soil by the labour of Slaves; the greatest practical error, as well as the greatest calamity, that has ever disgraced and afflicted human nature.

WILLIAM ROSCOE, PRESIDENT,
ISAAC HODGSON, SECRETARY.

Liverpool, 16th February, 1824.